

Whitburn Center Good Governance Toolkit

Improving governance behaviors need not be complicated, nor does it require an expensive consultant. The following resources should be shared with all members of a governing board during an annual on-boarding process, and revisited annually or as potential governing problems arise:

Page 2 - *Sample Job Description*: This document explains the expectations for a governing board member. It should serve as a guiding document for the individual, as well as an accountability tool for the group as a whole. The template can be customized for your local government.

Page 3 - *Governance Vs. Operations Fact Sheet*: Role confusion is a common way governing boards fail. This simple fact sheet explains the difference between governance and operations so that board members can avoid micro-managing and instead focus on the governing task.

Page 4 - *Conflict Diagnostic Tool*: Negative conflict is the most common determinant of governing board failure. This tool enables board to identify and track conflict so that they may address it.

Page 7 - *Regenerative Relationships Tool*: Establishing a culture of trust and openness will improve governing board performance, and ultimately enables improved organizational outcomes. This tool is a simple way to measure and track levels of trust and openness on a governing board. Identifying and tracking this information enables goal setting and improvement over time.

Page 10 - *Sample Alignment Statements*: These sample statements can be used as is, or adapted as needed, to establish a common approach to accountability, strategic planning, and non-partisanship on a governing board.

Page 11 - *Key Concepts for City Council/Village Board Members*: A simple guide to municipal finance topics likely to come up during board deliberations.

Page 12 - *Key Concepts for School Board Members*: A simple guide to school finance and performance topics likely to come up during board deliberations.

Page 13 - *Robert's Rules of Order*: The final two pages of this toolkit is a simple guide to making motions using Robert's Rules of Order.

Sample Board Member Job Description

Board members are elected by voters to represent their interests as a member of the council/board. Members aid in policy adoption and plan the future of the organization by voting on tax rates, contract approvals, land-use, building projects, and more. Board members are responsible for the adoption of the annual budget, and oversee the performance of the municipal manager/superintendent.

Roles & Responsibilities of Board Members

- Maintain regular attendance at board and committee meetings.
- Provide timely correspondence with constituents seeking information.
- Establish short and long-term goals with associated outcomes that reflect the desires of constituents.
- Provide clear policy guidance to the municipal manager/superintendent.
- Hire, evaluate, and terminate the municipal manager/superintendent as needed.
- Serve on sub-committees and openly share committee information with board colleagues.
- Serve as a member of the legislative body for the municipality, performing legislative tasks including but not limited to:
 - o Approval and adoption of the municipal annual budget.
 - o Regulating business activity through licensing and permits.
 - o Reviewing Land Use policies and determine future growth and development.
 - o Establishing tax rates and other fees.
 - o Adoption and revision of municipal ordinances and policies.

Qualifications for Board Members

- Board members shall meet all requirements for age and residency as specified under state law.
- Board members shall possess working knowledge of municipal/school district management and finance.
- Board members shall be committed to regular attendance at council/board meetings and workshops.
- Board members shall be committed to the ideals of democratic governance, including transparency, civility, honesty, and support for final council/board decisions.
- Board members shall recuse themselves from any board deliberation in which there is a clear conflict of interest.

Governance v. Operations Fact Sheet

A high-functioning governing board understands its role and avoids meddling in the day-to-day operations of government. Failure to understand the difference between governance and operations can lead governing board members to undermine the municipal executive and alienate municipal staff.

What are Governance Activities?

Governance activities are those that provide high-level oversight of the local government, they include:

- Organization-level goal setting
- Deciding scope of services to be provided
- Program creation
- Budget approval
- Creating policies
- Approving legislation
- Evaluating the organizational executive

What are Operations Activities?

Operations activities relate to the day-to-day operations of an organization, they include:

- Hiring and firing staff
- Managing staff
- Deploying resources across the organization
- Reporting on goals
- Developing budgets
- Implementing policies

Tips to Avoid Meddling in Operations

- Always make your municipal executive/superintendent aware of any direct contacts you have with staff. Remember staff do not work directly for you.
- Make the municipal executive/superintendent aware of any site visits or tours of municipal/school district properties.
- Do not represent yourself as speaking on behalf of your local government in the media or at public events. Always introduce yourself as one member of a governing body.
- When in doubt about your role, i.e. whether an action will meddle in operations, contact your municipal executive/superintendent or a longstanding member of your governing board for guidance.

Conflict Diagnostic Tool

A healthy level of conflict on a governing board can enhance discussion, bring more ideas to the table, and lead to better organizational outcomes. An unhealthy level of conflict can derail productive discussions, prevent decisions from being made, and lead to poor organizational outcomes. This simple tool will assess your board’s overall conflict levels and specific conflict types. The provided discussion questions can empower your board to address conflict that may derail your governing process.

Step 1: Diagnosing Total Conflict

To diagnose overall conflict levels board members should:

- 1) State the extent to which they agree with the following statements, where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.
- 2) Compile board averages for each statement.
- 3) Calculate the difference, in absolute value, between individual responses and overall board averages.

Statement	Your Answer	Board Average	Difference
General Conflict: Conflict among some board members is high			
Relationship Conflict: Disagreements between board members often become personalized			
Coalition Conflict: Board coalitions (two or more individual members joining forces) tend to form along predictable lines (e.g. political party, male/female, etc.)”			
Entrenched Conflict: During board negotiations, prior conflicts often resurface			
Buy-In Conflict: Board decisions are not supported by all members once made			
Total			

Conflict Diagnostic Tool Continued

Step 2: Discussing Answers

Members should add up their personal scores and average board scores and discuss using the answer key and questions below.

5 – 10: Low conflict board.

Boards with the absence of conflict may be extremely well developed, but often are at risk of groupthink, and/or being a rubber stamp for an executive. Boards scoring in this range should discuss the following questions:

- Do members feel comfortable voicing their opinions?
- Does the municipal executive dominate board discussions?
- Do board members feel prepared for board deliberations?

11 – 19: Moderate conflict board

Boards with moderate conflict are usually the highest functioning. Boards scoring in this range should discuss the following questions:

- Are there any specific items where the average conflict scores are particularly high or low? If so, why?
- Are the moderate conflict levels translating into overall board performance? How so?
- Are there any specific areas where you wish there was more or less conflict?

20 – 25: High conflict board

Boards with high levels of conflict are at risk of governing paralysis, where conflict inhibits the capacity for productive deliberation and decision making. Boards scoring in this range should discuss the following questions:

- Are there predictable triggers for board conflict? If so, what are they?
- Are there specific policy issues that are increasing conflict on the board? If so, what are they?
- Does conflict typically lead to a resolution? Why or why not?
- Do board members agree on the role of the governing board?

Conflict Diagnostic Tool Continued

Step 3: Diagnosing Specific Conflict Types and Outliers

Any individual responses of 5 (Strongly Agree), group average responses above 4 (Agree), or difference scores above 1 should be flagged for further discussion. Depending on the conflict type highlighted the following questions should be broached by the group.

- *General Conflict*: Is the presence of conflict preventing productive discussions? Why or why not?
- *Relationship Conflict*: Can we pinpoint the source of the relationship conflict?
- *Coalition Conflict*: What are the nature of the coalitions on our board?
- *Entrenched Conflict*: Why are we unable to move on once a decision is made? Is it a lack of trust?
- *Authority Conflict*: Why do we accept or not accept board decisions as legitimate?

Step 4: Tracking Progress

Identifying conflict is the first step towards resolving it. A governing board should administer the conflict diagnostic tool annually and track changes year to year. This includes identifying changes in the overall level of conflict, as well as changes in specific types of conflict present on the board. Though a diagnostic tool alone cannot mitigate conflict, it can ensure all governing board participants are cognizant of the types of conflict that exists on their board so they can react accordingly.

Regenerative Relationships Tool

Regenerative relations refers to the ways in which board member deliberations increase (or erode) group trust and performance. A group that promotes regenerative relations grows closer over time, ultimately building a culture of trust that leads to higher overall performance despite disagreements over specific policy decisions.

Step 1: Identifying Trust Levels

To identify overall levels of trust, board members should:

- 1) State the extent to which they agree with the following statements, where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.
- 2) Compile board averages for each statement.
- 3) Calculate the difference, in absolute value, between individual responses and overall board averages.

Statement	Your Answer	Board Average	Difference
Members can take each other at their word			
Members do what they say they will do			
Members willingly try new things without fear of ridicule			
Members willingly try new things without fear of retribution			
Members are open about their own preferences			
Members are open about how they feel about other members' preferences			
Total			

Regenerative Relationships Tool Continued

Step 2: Discussing Answers

Members should add up their personal scores and average board scores and discuss using the answer key and questions below.

6 – 13: Low trust board: A board with very low levels of trust is unlikely to make progress on substantive governing issues. Any progress that is made will be short-lived, and board deliberations are a stressful and unpleasant experience. Boards with low trust should discuss the following questions:

- What is the source of our collective distrust? Is it personal, ideological, learned, or something else?
- Are there any areas in which we do trust one another? How might we build on that to increase trust elsewhere?
- How is our lack of trust impacting our constituents? Are they being served well?

14 – 21: Medium trust board: Most governing boards will have a medium level of trust. Generally scoring in this area is a signal that trust is a work in progress and/or specific to certain board functions. Boards with medium trust should discuss the following questions:

- In what areas do we trust one another most? How might we build on that to increase trust elsewhere?
- Are there triggers, like certain words, topics, or messengers that increase or decrease trust in our interactions?
- Do our board rules and structures prevent us from increasing overall trust?

22 – 30: High trust board: A high trust board is positioned to maximize their positive impact on the organization they oversee. The greatest task of a high trust board is maintaining trust as board turnover occurs. They should discuss the following questions:

- Are there any threats to our high level of trust?
- Is our trust translating into governing success? Why or why not?
- Is our trust with one another evident to the community? If not, how do we communicate it to our constituents?

Regenerative Relationships Tool Continued

Step 3: Discussing outliers

Any individual responses of 1 (Strongly Disagree), group average responses below 2 (Disagree), or difference scores above 1 should be flagged for further discussion. The goal should be to ask:

- What is the source of the specific type of distrust?
- How can individual responses that differ from the group be explained and reconciled?

Step 4: Tracking Progress

Identifying the presence or lack of presence of regenerative relations is the first step towards improving trust, and using trust to maximize performance. A governing board should administer the tool annually and track changes year to year. The results can help communicate what is (and is not) working to the public. More importantly, this brings information directly related to group performance to the full board at regular intervals. The first step to addressing problems is identifying them.

Sample Governing Alignment Statements

Accountability Statement: An accountability statement aligns all board members to a common definition of accountability. A good statement includes:

- A clear definition of the clientele to whom the governing body is accountable.
- A clear definition of how the governing body conceptualizes accountability.
- An articulation of what successful accountability look likes when implemented, i.e. increased citizen satisfaction, increased tax base, etc. The key is that the local government's accountability conceptualization is measurable.

Below is a sample accountability statement for the fictional city of Wisconsin Heights:

The City of Wisconsin Heights is accountable to all city residents. Our government defines accountability as meeting the needs of citizens at an affordable price, and in a transparent fashion. Our government will comply with all open-meetings and transparency laws, will survey residents to ensure majority satisfaction with municipal services, and keep the property tax levy below the average for medium-sized Wisconsin cities.

Commitment to Strategic Planning: Though most municipalities engage in strategic planning, there is often a disconnect between the process and actual implementation. In other words, plans sit on a shelf. Formalizing a commitment to strategic planning through a resolution gives new board members a clear understanding of its role and importance. Below is a sample statement for the fictional city of Wisconsin Heights:

The City of Wisconsin Heights uses its strategic plan to guide municipal goals and operations. All City Council members will be given a copy of the strategic plan upon taking office, will commit to reading the plan, and will consider the plan when making policy decisions. Municipal staff will consider the plan during the budgeting process, and will explain how each department budget aligns with the plan's goals. The strategic plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every five years.

Commitment to Non-Partisanship: The presence of partisanship on non-partisan boards can often derail the governing process. Formalizing a board's commitment to non-partisanship through resolution formalizes the board's desire to not allow explicit partisanship into their activities. Below is a sample statement for the fictional city of Wisconsin Heights.

All City of Wisconsin Heights Council Members accept and respect the non-partisan nature of their office. Council members shall not, in their official capacity, endorse any candidate for partisan political office at the local, state or federal level. Endorsement in an official capacity includes having one's name, picture, or voice appear, alongside identification as a member of the Wisconsin Heights City Council, in any campaign material paid for and/or endorsed by a partisan candidate or political party.

Key Concepts for City Council/Village Board Members

Major Revenue Sources

- Shared revenue refers to general state municipal and utility aid sent to Wisconsin local governments for supporting general government operations. Shared revenue makes up about 12 percent of the total revenue spent on Wisconsin local government.
- Property taxes are the largest revenue source for local governments. Property taxes make up about 69 percent of total revenues spent on Wisconsin local government.
- User charges are direct fee-for-service charges in local government (one example are garbage collection fees). User charges make up about 16 percent of total revenues spent on Wisconsin local government.

Revenue Limits: The state of Wisconsin limits increases to the local property tax levy to the percentage change in a local government's equalized value due to net new construction. In other words, allowable tax levy increases are a function of the amount of new construction in a municipality.

Expenditure Restraint: The expenditure restraint program provides additional aid to municipalities that limit the growth in their annual budget. The allowable growth to qualify for this aid is determined through a statutory formula. In essence, it is an incentive to limit overall growth in a municipal budget.

Other Aids: Local governments obtain numerous other state and federal aids. More information on these aids is available from the Department of Revenue: <https://www.revenue.wi.gov/Pages/RA/LocalGovDashboardGlossary.aspx>.

Debt: Wisconsin municipalities have two major sources for debt-financing. The first, general obligation debt, is secured by the tax base and is used for projects that benefit the municipality as a whole. In Wisconsin, municipalities have a general obligation debt limit equal to five percent of their equalized value. The other major type of debt are revenue bonds. These bonds are secured by future revenue generated by utilities and other user-charge services. Revenue bonds are used for capital expenses related to revenue generating facilities.

Tax Incremental Financing (TIF): TIF districts are a funding instrument where municipalities incentivize a new development by borrowing against anticipated future tax revenues to be generated by the new development. Only certain costs are eligible for TIF support. More information on TIFs is available from the Department of Revenue: <https://www.revenue.wi.gov/Pages/SLF/tif.aspx>.

Other Resources

- Detailed municipal finance data is available from the Department of Revenue: <https://www.revenue.wi.gov/Pages/RA/Local-Government-Dashboard.aspx> and the Wisconsin Policy Forum: <https://wispolicyforum.org/research/municipal-datatool-examining-and-comparing-wisconsin-cities-and-villages/>.
- The Wisconsin League of Municipalities provides a variety of resources to assist elected officials here: <https://www.lwm-info.org/31/Resources>.

Key Concepts for School Board Members

Basic of the School Funding Formula

- 1) The legislature sets annual per-pupil revenue limit increases in the state's biennial budget process. (Revenue limits are the maximum amount of revenue, defined as the sum of state aid and the property tax levy, that a school district may raise in any given year without going to referendum).
- 2) Districts add the per-pupil revenue limit increase to the previous year's per-pupil revenue limit. So, if a district had a per-pupil revenue limit of \$10,000 in year 1, and the legislature approved a \$50 increase, the district would have a per-pupil revenue limit of \$10,200 in year 2.
- 3) Total state and local funding through the school aid formula is determined by multiplying the per-pupil revenue limit by district enrollment. District enrollment is based on a three-year rolling average. So if a district has 500 students, and the per-pupil revenue limit is \$10,200, that district would be eligible for \$5,100,000 (500X\$10,200).
- 4) The school aid formula is used to determine how much of the total funding eligibility comes from state aid (total state aid is determined by the legislature during the budget process), and how much comes from local property taxpayers. Districts with higher property valuations are more reliant on the property tax, and those with lower property valuations are more reliant on state aid.
- 5) Districts may go to referendum for permission to exceed revenue limits.

Categorical Aids: School districts receive a variety of state and federal categorical aids that exist outside of revenue limits. These aids are tied to specific purposes like transportation and special education. A full list of categorical aids is available here: <https://dpi.wi.gov/sfs/aid/categorical/overview>.

Performance: Wisconsin students take the Forward Exam in grades 3-8 in Math and English, grades 4 and 8 in Science, and in grades 4, 8, and 10 in Social Studies. All high school students take the ACT in grade 11. School and district level results are available via the official state report card system here: <https://dpi.wi.gov/families-students/data/report-cards>, and the WideDash system here: <https://wisedash.dpi.wi.gov/Dashboard/dashboard/22275>. Board members should consider both proficiency scores (which indicate where students are at) and growth scores (which indicate how student scores are changing over time).

Other Resources

- Data on attendance, graduation rate, suspensions, and more is available from DPI: <https://wisedash.dpi.wi.gov/Dashboard/dashboard/22275>.
- Detailed information on school funding is available from the [Legislative Fiscal Bureau](#).
- More information on School Board roles is available from the Wisconsin Association of School Boards: <https://wasb.org/>

Robert's Rules of Order Simple Guide to Motions

To:	You say:	Interrupt Speaker	Second Needed	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Needed
Adjourn	"I move that we adjourn"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Recess	"I move that we recess until..."	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Complain about noise, room temp., etc.	"Point of privilege"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair Decides
Suspend further consideration of something	"I move that we table it"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
End debate	"I move the previous question"	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Postpone consideration of something	"I move we postpone this matter until..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Introduce business	"I move that..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority